A

SERMON

About the

Government of the Thoughts,

Preach'd before the

King & Queen,

AT

WHITE-HALL,

The 4th of *March*, being the 2d *Sunday* in *Lent*, 169$\frac{3}{4}$.

By the Most Reverend Father in God,

JOHN Lord Archbishop of *YORK*.

Publish'd by Their Majesties Especial Command.

The Second Edition.

LONDON,

Printed by *Tho. Warren*, for *Walter Kettilby*, at the Bishop's Head in St. *Paul's* Church-Yard,

MDCXCIV.

A

SERMON

About the

Government of the Thoughts,

Preach'd before the

King and Queen.

PROVERBS iv. 23.

Keep thy Heart with all diligence, for out of it are the iſſues of life.

THE Argument with which this Audience was entertained the laſt *Lord's Day*, being the *Government of the Tongue*; I cannot think it improper or unſeaſonable for me, who have the Honour to come next, to treat about the *Government of the Thoughts*: There being

ing a near relation between theſe two, and a neceſſary dependence of the one upon the other.

Our *Words* indeed are more eaſily governed than our *Thoughts*, becauſe they are more in our power. But it will be impoſſible either to govern our *Words* or our *Actions*, as we ſhould, unleſs we firſt bring our *Thoughts* in ſome meaſure under Government.

I muſt confeſs this Argument of the *Government of the Thoughts*, though it be a very uſeful; yet it ſeems alſo a very nice and difficult one, through the great variety of Caſes, ariſing from Mens different Tempers, which will not come under the ſame Rules, and yet ought to be provided for. But however this ſhall not diſcourage me from undertaking this Argument; it ſhall only make me more careful as to what I ſay about it. That is, to have reſpect, as much as I can, to all ſorts of Tempers, and to deliver what I have to ſay with ſo much Plainneſs, that every body may go along with me.

The *Words* upon which I ground my Diſcourſe are thoſe of *Solomon*, which I have read unto you, and which contain one of thoſe Precepts that he lays down for the Religious Conduct of our Lives. *Keep* (ſaith he) *thy Heart with all diligence, for out of it are the iſſues of life.*

Not

Not to trouble you with what others have ſaid upon this Text, I take the true Meaning of it to be this.

By the [*Heart*] here, which we are exhorted to *keep*, we are to underſtand the *Inward Thoughts* and *Motions*, and *Affections* of our Souls or Spirits; all which in the inſpired Writings are conſtantly ſaid to be ſeated in the *Heart*. This undoubtedly is the Scripture-Notion of the *Heart*.

And when we are here bid to *keep our Hearts with all diligence*, I think there is no queſtion to be made, the Meaning is, That we ſhould diligently attend to the Thoughts and Motions, and Affections of our Minds; that we ſhould watch them narrowly, leſt at any time we ſhould give our Conſent to ſome thing we ought not. This is the Meaning of *keeping our Hearts with all diligence*.

And then a Reaſon is added, why it concerns us thus to keep them. And that is this. Becauſe *out of the Heart are the iſſues of Life*. What is the Meaning of that Phraſe? Plainly this. The Iſſues, the Fruits, the Effects that are ſhewn in our Lives and Converſation, do certainly proceed from the Heart, and therefore accordingly as that is well or ill *guarded* or *kept*, ſo will our Lives and Converſations be. The Goodneſs or Badneſs of

our

our Lives doth altogether depend upon the attending or not attending to the *Thoughts*, and Motions, and Inclinations of our Minds. As our Caution and Watchfulneſs in this Point is greater or leſs, ſo will our Courſe of Life be better or worſe. And therefore it concerns us all, that mean to live well, to be infinitely careful in this Matter.

This is a plain Account of the Advice that is here given us. So that you ſee if I mean to diſcourſe pertinently to my Text, my Argument muſt be (what I ſaid) the Care, and Management, and *Government of our Thoughts*, as they fall under a Religious Conſideration.

In treating of this Argument there ſeem to me Two things needful to be done.

Firſt, To give an Account what Power a Man hath over his own *Thoughts*.

Secondly, To ſhew wherein the Art of *Governing* of them doth conſiſt.

It is indeed this *Second* thing which my Text naturally leads me to ſpeak to: But I cannot ſpeak to that to any Purpoſe, till I have made way for it by clearing the *Firſt*. It is in vain to give Rules about the *Government of our Thoughts*, till we know how far we have Power over them; how far they fall or do not fall under our Conduct and Management. And

And I muſt needs ſay, that moſt of thoſe I have met with, that have diſcours'd about the *Government of Thoughts*, by not enquiring into, and ſetling this Point, have been ſo far from benefiting all their Hearers, that deſired to receive benefit by their good advices, that to ſeveral of them they have done harm; Becauſe as to them their advices have been perfectly unpracticable. Now thoſe that by their own Experience found them to be ſo, inſtead of conſidering that the Teacher might be in a miſtake, or that He did not ſufficiently weigh and examine the Caſe of all Perſons he gave his advice to, have peremptorily concluded that they themſelves were in the fault, and therefore they were in an evil condition, becauſe they found themſelves not able to live up to what was adviſed them.

The *firſt* Queſtion then is, How far a Man hath power over his own Thoughts. There is not indeed any ſingle Anſwer to be given to this Queſtion, that will fit all Men. For that is impoſſible. It would be as unreaſonable to demand it, as it would be to require of a Workman to make a Garment, that ſhould fit all ſorts and ſizes of Men.

Some Men by the very Principles of their Make and Conſtitution, are much better able to govern their Thoughts than others. Some that are natu-

rally weaker, have by long uſe and many tryals obtained a greater power over their Thoughts than others. Again, the ſame Perſons that at ſome times have a greater Power over the motions of their Minds, may at other times have a leſs Command over them; and this according as their Health, or their Buſineſs, or a hundred Contingencies of outward things do affect them. So that all that can be done, as to this matter, is to lay down ſome general Propoſitions, which every Body is to apply to himſelf, as there is Occaſion. And Five of this kind I have to offer, and which, I think, will take in all, or the greateſt part of what belongs to this Argument.

The *firſt* Propoſition I lay down is this, That the Firſt Motions of our Minds are very little, if at all, in our Power.

By the *firſt Motions of our Minds*, I mean thoſe ſudden Thoughts, or Apprehenſions, or Paſſions, or Deſires, which are excited in our Minds by any Object that is at that time preſented to our Imagination. As to theſe, I ſay, we are not ſo much Maſters of our ſelves as to be able to ſtop them; nay, though perhaps they be very irregular. And the Reaſon is, becauſe they are produced ſo quick, that there is not time enough given for Reaſon to interpoſe.

There

There is no neceſſity indeed that a Man ſhould give Conſent to theſe Motions; but as for their coming into his Mind, he can no more help it, than he can help his preſent Temper, or the preſent Circumſtances he is ingaged in.

Thus for Inſtance. Do you think it poſſible for a Man that is of a Fiery Paſſionate Temper, to avoid the feeling a ſudden reſentment of Anger ariſing in his Mind if he meets with any unexpected affront, or other great Provocation? Or for a Man that deſires to be well thought of, not to entertain ſome vanity of Imagination, when he hears himſelf commended or flatter'd? Or for a Man that is addicted to Pleaſures, not to feel ſome irregular Inclinations in himſelf towards the gratifying his Appetites in thoſe things, when he hath all the Temptations before him? and thus in all other Caſes.

I grant indeed that a Man by long Conſideration, and a ſerious exerciſing himſelf in the ways of Vertue and Piety, may bring himſelf to that Temper, that he ſhall not have ſo many irregular undecent Motions in his own Mind, upon any occaſion whatſoever, as he was wont to have; and that thoſe that were formerly Temptations to him, will at laſt be none: But ſtill I ſay, the firſt Motions and workings of his Mind however they be

occaſioned, are in a great meaſure out of his Power; he cannot ſtop them; and therefore the *Art* of *governing* his *Thoughts* doth not ly there.

The *ſecond* Propoſition I lay down is this, When a Man's Mind is vigorouſly affected and poſſeſſed, either with the outward Objects of ſenſe, or with inward Paſſions of any kind, in that caſe he hath little or no Command of his Thoughts. His Mind at that time will be in a manner wholly taken up with that it is then full off: Nor will he be able till thoſe impreſſions be worn off, to think freely of what he pleaſeth.

Thus for inſtance, When a Man is under a ſharp, tormenting Pain; as he cannot avoid the *feeling* of that pain, ſo neither can he avoid the *thinking* of it. When one is full of grief for the loſs of a dear Relation; or tranſported with Paſſion for ſome unworthy uſage he hath met with: It is in vain to ſay, Pray think not of theſe matters; for theſe things muſt and will in a great meaſure employ his Thoughts, till his Paſſions do cool, and the Impreſſions that cauſed them be vaniſhed.

Thus, for a Man to come from ſome Buſineſs in which he is more than ordinarily concerned; or from the hearing ſome very good or very bad News; I ſay to come freſh from this to the ſaying

ing his Prayers: I do not, I cannot wonder, that in this caſe his Mind will be much upon his *Buſineſs*, or his *News*, notwithſtanding all his Endeavours to the contrary.

For the nature of Man is ſuch, that he cannot ſo of a ſudden turn his mind from one Buſineſs to another; but that if he did cloſely and vigorouſly apply himſelf to the firſt Buſineſs, his Thoughts will for ſome time run upon it, even after he hath applyed his Mind to the other.

I do not deny, but that a Man may often ſo order his affairs, as to be able to keep his Mind clear and free from ſuch Prepoſſeſſions as I am now ſpeaking of, ſo as that when he comes to apply himſelf to any Buſineſs he hath a mind to, he may intend it with his whole might. But this I ſay, If our Minds be once engaged with warm Thoughts about any thing; it is very hard, if not impoſſible to get them diſengaged of a ſudden. So that the *Art* of *Governing* our *Thoughts* doth not much lie in that neither.

Thirdly there are ſome Caſes likewiſe, where a Man's Thoughts are in a manner forced upon him, from the preſent Temper and Indiſpoſition of his Body. So that though he be in no Paſſion, though there be no unuſual Objects of ſenſe that excite thoſe Thoughts in him, nay though he ne-

ver

ver ſo much reſolve not to think upon thoſe things; yet ſo long as that Habit of Body laſts, he cannot avoid thoſe kind of Thoughts: So that in this Caſe alſo, there is little room left for the *Government* of *Thoughts*.

That which I now ſay, happens frequently, not only in all ſorts of diſtempers where the Brain is viſibly diſturbed, as in Feavers and the like, which often cauſe a thouſand delirous Fancies, and ſometimes down-right Madneſs and Diſtraction: But alſo in other Caſes where there ſeems to be no Feaver, or other viſible Diſtemper; nor doth the Brain as to other matters ſeem to be at all diſorder'd; But the Perſons in all appearance are ſound both in Body and Mind.

And this is the Caſe of ſome deeply *Hypochondriack* Perſons; many of which will be haunted with a *Sett* of *Thoughts* and *Fancies*, that they can by no means get rid of, though they deſire it never ſo earneſtly.

Sometimes they cannot get it out of their Heads, but that they are *Atheiſts* and *Infidels*; They neither believe in God nor in Jeſus Chriſt, nor have any ſenſe at all of Religion.

Sometimes they are tormented with *Blaſphemous* Thoughts, and they cannot ſet themſelves to the performance of any Office of Devotion, but a thouſand

thouſand impious Fancies will come in and ſpoil all.

Sometimes they fancy they are guilty of ſeveral grievous Crimes, which it is to be hoped, it was hardly poſſible they ſhould be guilty of; nay you cannot convince them but that they do every day commit ſome of theſe Crimes, becauſe they imagine they give conſent to them.

And whileſt theſe ſorts of Thoughts fill their Imaginations, there is not a Paſſage in the Bible that they read, nor a Sermon that they hear, but they find ſomething in it, which they do ſo perverſly apply to their own Caſe, as thereby to encreaſe their trouble, but not to get any relief.

I have known ſeveral well-diſpoſed Perſons, and ſome of them ſincerely Pious, that have been in this Condition.

What now is to be ſaid to this? Why, it is very certain that all theſe Thoughts and Fancies are thruſt upon them, and are not the free, natural, voluntary Operations of their own minds; but the effect of Vapours or Hypochondriac Melancholy. Nor can the Perſons themſelves any more help their thus Thinking, or Fancying; than they can help the Diſturbances of their Dreams when they have a mind to ſleep quietly. Indeed we may properly enough call theſe *Fancies* of theirs, their

Waking

waking Dreams; as their *Dreams* are their *ſleeping Fancies*.

Well but now of all perſons whatſoever, theſe People are moſt deſirous to have *Rules* given them for the Government of the Thoughts. And I cannot blame them, becauſe their Thoughts are certainly very Troubleſome. But truly if we would ſpeak pertinently to their Caſe; inſtead of giving them Advices for the regulating their *Thoughts*, they ſhould rather be adviſed to look after their *Bodies*, and by the help of good Preſcriptions to get rid of thoſe *Fumes* and *Vapours* which occaſion theſe Fancies. When the Cauſe is removed, the Effect will ſoon ceaſe. I do not in the leaſt doubt, what ever theſe People may think of their own Caſe, but that this is as properly a *Bodily* Diſeaſe, as a *Feaver*, or Fits of the *Falling Sickneſs*.

In the mean time while they are in this Condition, whatever Rules are proper to be given to other Perſons for the *Government* of their *Thoughts*, of all People living thoſe *Rules* do the leaſt concern them. For thoſe Thoughts which they complain of, do not at all fall under Regulation or Government; becauſe they are ſuggeſted to their minds whether they will or no. And for my part, I think it a great deal more adviſable (if it could be)

be) to neglect and deſpiſe them; than to be perpetually ſtrugling and diſputing with them, and vexing themſelves about them.

But you will ſay, if Men be ſuch Slaves to their Thoughts, and are thus neceſſarily paſſive under them, Where is the Freedom of Thought? To this I Anſwer,

In the *Fourth* place, out of theſe three Caſes I before mentioned, we have *Liberty of Thinking*, and may chuſe our own Thoughts. And that Liberty and Freedom we have in *Thinking* doth, to my apprehenſion mainly conſiſt in this, *viz.* That all of us (who are not in the Circumſtances I have been hitherto ſpeaking of) can, if we pleaſe, apply ourMinds more vigorouſly to one ſort of things than to another; and accordingly, as we do thus apply our Minds, ſo will the moſt of our Thoughts be.

It is in our power among the multitude of Objects which preſent themſelves to our Minds, (as for Inſtance, *God*, *Vertue*, *Holineſs*, *Heaven*, *Wealth*, *Power*, *Greatneſs*, *Preferments*, *Fine Cloths*, *Splendid Equipage*, *Senſual Pleaſures*, *Recreations*, *Diverſiſements*, *Knowledge*, *Learning*, *Arts*, and the like: I ſay, that among all this multitude of Objects that preſent themſelves to our Minds,) it is in our power to determine our ſelves, which of them

we will dwell upon, and make a *Buſineſs* of. And accordingly, when at any time we have pitched upon any of them, as a *Buſineſs*, it is in our power to mind that Buſineſs, either more or leſs diligently. And if it be ſuch a one, as that we mean in good earneſt to concern our ſelves about it, it will then ſo fill our Minds, as that by attending to that, we ſhall either prevent in a great meaſure other Thoughts from coming into our Heads; or if they do come in, they will not long ſtay there, but will very ſpeedily give place to that which is our main Buſineſs at that time.

And the reaſon of this is plain; Becauſe our Natures are of that Make, that two things at once cannot well poſſeſs our Minds; and therefore if we be intent about one thing, we cannot have much room or leiſure for Thoughts of another nature.

But then *Fifthly* and laſtly, Though this that I have ſaid be the true Nature of that Power we have over our Thoughts, as to the directing them to a particular Object: Yet there is another Power we have over them that ought here more eſpecially to be conſidered; becauſe in it are laid the very Foundations of *Vertue* and *Vice*, and upon account of it, all our Thoughts become either morally *good* or *evil*.

That

That which I mean is this. Though we cannot, in many Caſes, think always of what we would; Nay, though we cannot hinder abundance of Thoughts from coming into our Minds againſt our will: Yet it is always in our power to aſſent to our Thoughts, or to deny our Conſent to them. And here it is that the *Morality* of our *Thoughts* begins. According as we *Aſſent* or *Diſſent* to the Motions that are made in our Minds; ſo will our *Thoughts* have the Notion of *Vertuous* or *ſinful* Thoughts.

When any Temptations are preſented to us from without, we cannot perhaps (as I ſaid before) avoid the feeling an irregular Paſſion, or Motion, or Inclination ſtirring within us upon occaſion thereof: But yet at that very time it is in our power whether we will comply with thoſe Paſſions and Inclinations, or not; whether we will conſent to them, or not; whether we will purſue them further, or not. Now if we do not conſent to them, but endeavour to ſtop, and ſtifle, and reſiſt them as ſoon as we are aware of them; There is yet no harm done. Our Thoughts how undecent or irregular ſoever they were, are rather to be accounted the *Infirmities* of our *Corrupt* Nature, than our *Sins* properly ſo called.

And thus it is likewiſe as to our *Wandring*

Thoughts in our *Prayers*. If we ſtrive againſt them, and endeavour to keep our Minds in a Devout Compoſed Temper, and attend as well as we can to the Duty we are about: I ſay, if we do this, I hope Thoſe *Diſtractions* and *Wandrings* will never riſe up in Judgment againſt us.

And as for the frightful *Blaſphemous* Fancies, which, as I told you, ſome even Pious Perſons are tormented with: As to them I ſay, They of all other irregular Thoughts have the leaſt danger of Sin in them, though they be not ſo ſolemnly and formally diſputed with, and conteſted againſt. Becauſe indeed they are ſo terrible in their own Nature, that no Man in his Wits, and that hath any ſenſe of God or Goodneſs, can be ſuppoſed to conſent to them. They are indeed great *Infelicities*, but by no means any *Sin*, any farther than we approve of them; and to approve of them for any tolerably good Man is impoſſible.

But then on the other ſide, If we conſent to any wicked Motion or Inclination that we feel in our ſelves; let it come in how it will, never ſo ſuddenly, never ſo unexpectedly; if we cloſe with any Thought that prompts us to Evil, ſo as to be pleaſed with it, to delight in it, to think of purſuing it, till it be brought into Action: In that

that Caſe we are no longer to plead our *Original Corruption*; for in that very inſtant we become *Actual Sinners*, Actual tranſgreſſors of the Law of God, the Obligation of which reaches to our very Hearts and Thoughts as well as our Actions. Though yet we are not ſo great Tranſgreſſors, ſo long as our Sin is only in Thought or deſire, or purpoſe; as if it had proceeded to Outward Action.°

All this is taught us for true Divinity, by no leſs an Author than St. *James*, in the firſt Chapter of his *Epiſtle*, *v.* 13, 14, 15. *Let no man ſay when he is tempted, I am tempted of God; for God tempteth no man. But every man is tempted when he is drawn away of his own Luſt, and Enticed. Then when Luſt hath conceived, it bringeth forth Sin, and Sin, when it is finiſhed, bringeth forth Death.*

Which paſſage of the Apoſtle doth plainly contain theſe *three* Propoſitions.

Firſt, That no Man is drawn to commit Sin by any State or Condition that God hath put him into; no nor by any Temptation, either outward or inward that is preſented to him. It is not a Sin to be Tempted; no nor to feel that we are tempted by ſome diſorderly Inclination that ariſes in our Minds thereupon.

But *ſecondly* then our Sin begins, when we yield to the Temptation, when we are *drawn away by*

our

our own Luſts, and enticed, when they get the Victory over us, and we do conſent to them. Then *Luſt hath conceived and bringeth forth Sin.*

But *Thirdly*, Though the very conſent of our Wills to a Temptation, be a Sin in us: Yet that Sin is not ſo great as it will be afterwards, if it be brought to Action. Sin in the deſire or purpoſe, is but an *Embryo*; it is but the firſt Rudiments of Sin; but when it comes to be acted, it is then a Sin in its full dimenſions; and the Conſequents of it may be Fatal without Repentance. *Sin when it is finiſhed bringeth forth Death.*

Having thus given ſome Account how far our *Hearts* or *Thoughts* do fall under *Government*; I now come to my *ſecond* Point, that is, to treat of the *Art of Governing them*, or to lay down the neceſſary *Rules* and Directions which are to be obſerved in order thereunto.

And we ſhall not need to go far for theſe *Rules*, for they will all naturally flow from the Principles I have already laid down. And I think, they may conveniently enough be reduced likewiſe to theſe *Five* following.

Firſt, From what hath been ſaid, it appears, that the Firſt and great Point to be done by us, if we would keep our *Hearts* in a good Frame, and order

order our *Thoughts* to good purpoſes; is, that we rightly pitch our main Deſigns; that we chuſe that for the great Buſineſs of our lives, that really ought to be ſo.

Now what that is, can bear no diſpute with any Man that will fairly uſe his Reaſon. For certainly, that which is our greateſt Concernment in the World, ought to be our greateſt Buſineſs and Deſign in the World.

And it is evident to every one, that believes he hath a Soul to ſave, that his greateſt Concernment of all, is, to approve himſelf to that God who made him, and diſpoſes of all his affairs; and who accordingly as we ſincerely endeavour, or not endeavour to ſerve him, will make us either very Happy, or very Miſerable, both in this Life and the other. So that there can, as I ſaid, be no diſpute about what ought to be the great Buſineſs and Deſign of our whole Lives, and to which all other Buſineſſes muſt yield.

Now if we be ſo wiſe as really to propoſe this as our main End, and reſolve to mind it and follow it as ſuch; I ſay, if we be ſo wiſe as to do this; we have made a very great ſtep towards the obtaining a ſecurity to our ſelves, that the greateſt part of our Thoughts, and Deſires, and Affections will be ſuch as they ſhould be; ſuch as will

be

be acceptable to God, and ſatisfactory to our ſelves.

For as I told you before, what ever is our main Buſineſs, be it what it will, it will in a great meaſure draw all our Thoughts to it. Our Natures are ſo contrived, that we muſt always be thinking of ſome thing or other. But then they are ſo contrived likewiſe, that we ſhall think moſt of that, which is moſt in our Eye, moſt in our Eſteem, moſt in our Purſuit. And this is that which our Saviour tells us; *Where your Treaſure is there will your Heart be alſo.* What ever it be that you place your Happineſs in, upon that will your Thoughts run; upon that will your Deſires, your Inclinations, your Affections be fixed.

We have a World of Inſtances of the truth of this every day before our Eyes. If a Man hath ſet his heart on *Money*, and propoſeth it to himſelf as the Buſineſs of his Life to be Rich: Why, I dare ſay, ſuch a one will own to you, that moſt of his Thoughts are upon that Project; and that he finds it, ſo far from being difficult to keep his Mind cloſe and ſteady to his *Main Intereſt*, as he calls it; that it is rather difficult to him to think of any other Matters.

If a Man be given up to *Pleaſure*, and thinks nothing worthy his living for, but Wine and Women,

men, and good Eating, and good Company; Is it not natural to ſuch an one, to bend all his Thoughts that way? Or doth he put any force or violence upon himſelf, in thinking and contriving all the day long, how to bring to paſs the Gratification of his Luſts or his Appetites.

Why, my Brethren, if we did all of us in good earneſt make the Service of God, and the purchaſing Heaven and Happineſs to our ſelves, as much our Buſineſs, our End, our Deſign; as theſe Men make Wealth or Pleaſure to be theirs; We ſhould certainly be thus affected. The common courſe of our Thoughts, would naturally, and eaſily, without the leaſt conſtraint, run upon thoſe Objects: And we ſhould take as great delight in Thinking of *our* Treaſure, and Contriving for the obtaining of it; as they do in Thinking and Projecting for Theirs.

I ſay, Thus it would be with us. For I cannot for my life apprehend, what Charms there can be in Worldly, or Senſual things to attract a Man's Mind; What Fetters there can be in them, to *Bind* his *Thoughts*, and tye them to themſelves: But that there are the ſame, or greater, in Vertue and Goodneſs; in the Love and Favour of God; in a Pure Conſcience here, and Eternal Glory here-

after: Always provided, that they are as much made the Objects of our Choice and Purſuit, as the other.

And therefore I cannot but ſuſpect, where we ſee Men ſo very cold and backward to Spiritual things; and ſo apt to ſpend all their Thoughts upon trifling, vain, or worldly Matters, that it is with a great deal of Pains and Reluctancy, that they can bring themſelves to think of their Everlaſting Concernments: I ſay, I cannot but ſuſpect that theſe Perſons have not yet *laid up their Treaſure in Heaven*, as our Saviour expreſſeth it; They have not yet ſo wholly devoted themſelves to the Service of God, as to make it their *Main Buſineſs*. When once they have done that, I dare aſſure them, they will find it ſo far from being a force upon them, to think of good things, that it will be very natural to them; and they will find the greateſt Pleaſure in the World in ſo doing.

Secondly, Whoever would *keep* his *Heart* always in a good Frame, and be able to give a good account of his Thoughts to God, muſt have an eſpecial care to avoid two things, *viz. Idleneſs*, and *looſe Company*. For both of theſe do ſtrangely unhinge a Man's Mind; and diſarm it of that Severity,

rity, which is its beſt Guard and Defence againſt Evil Thoughts; and make it become an eaſie Prey to every Temptation that will attacque it.

A wiſe Man ſhould never be at ſuch a paſs, as to ſay, *I have nothing to do, I do not know how to ſpend my next Hour*: But ſhould ſo order the Courſe of his Life, that all the Portions of his Time, as much as is poſſible, may be filled with ſome uſeful, or at leaſt ſome innocent Employment.

It is *Idleneſs*, and having nothing to do, that is the Mother of moſt of thoſe vain, and unprofitable, and ſinful Fancies, in which ſome Men ſpend their days. And whereas Temptations do now and then come in the way of other Men; the *Idle* Man is forced to ſeek out Temptations for the ſhipwrack of his Vertue. And therefore, no Wonder, if he that ſeeks them, finds abundance of them.

And truly *Looſe* and *Impertinent Converſation*, which was the other thing I named, though it looks ſomething with a better Grace, yet is not much better than Idleneſs. For where-ever it is much uſed, it will ſo emaſculate a Man's Mind, and take off the edge and vigour of it, as to ſerious things, that he cannot eaſily get it into a

good Frame again. *Evil Communication* (ſaith St. *Paul*) *doth corrupt good Manners.* And therefore thoſe People, a great part of whoſe Life is taken up in gadding up and down; in Play; in merry Meetings; in telling or hearing idle Stories, and the like: It is impoſſible but their Thoughts and Inclinations, and the whole Frame of their Hearts will be ſuitable; that is to ſay, very frothy; very light and fooliſh; not to ſay, profane, and wicked, and Atheiſtical too, if the Company they much converſe with, be of that ſtrain.

Thirdly, Another thing of great moment, for the *keeping our Hearts*, is, to be as attentive as is poſſible to the *firſt Motions* of our Minds; and whenever we find that they tend toward ſomething that is forbidden, to ſtop them as ſoon as we can.

We cannot, as I told you before, often prevent irregular Deſires, or Paſſions, or Inclinations, from ariſing in our Minds, upon ſundry occaſions. But this we can do: As ſoon as we are aware of them, we can refuſe our Conſent to them; (and in that caſe I hope they will not be imputed to us as Sins;) Nay, not only ſo; but we can refuſe their breaking out, or ſhewing themſelves in our *Words*, or our *Actions*. For the Motions of our outward Members

Members are all at our Command, though the firſt Motions of our Minds be not.

Here therefore will lie a main Point in the Art of well governing our Minds and Thoughts. You cannot perhaps, for inſtance, prevent a ſudden Paſſion of *Anger* from riſing in your Minds upon *twenty* Accidents: But as ſoon as you feel this Paſſion, you can thus far ſtifle it; you can ſeal up your Mouth, ſo that the Paſſion ſhall not vent it ſelf in unſeemly Words; And if you will withdraw that Fuel from the new-kindled Fire, it will ſoon be extinguiſhed, and die. Whereas if you ſuffer it to break out in bitter Speeches and Expreſſions, it will flame beyond meaſure.

Thus again, If any undecent, impure Fancies or Deſires ſhould be excited in you upon any occaſion: It was not perhaps in your power to keep them from coming into your Minds: But it is in your power to withdraw from the Temptation that cauſed them; and to endeavour to direct your Thoughts to ſome other Object; at leaſt not to proceed one ſtep in any outward Action towards the Accompliſhing of thoſe Deſires. If you take this Courſe, the Diſturbance of your Mind will ſoon ceaſe, and you will return preſently to your ordinary Temper.

And

And let me tell you this further; That by your being thus careful to reſiſt and ſmother the firſt beginnings of Sin; You will not only preſerve in a great meaſure the Innocency of your Minds under the preſent Temptation; But you will alſo have this farther advantage, that by this means, you increaſe your Power over your Thoughts, againſt the next time that the Temptation returns. Every check you give to the firſt Motions of Sin, makes the next Aſſault of them the leſs furious. And if you do conſtantly uſe your ſelves, thus to Guard and Watch over your Hearts; you will in time obtain ſuch a Command over them, that you will not be troubled with a quarter of thoſe irregular deſires, and paſſions, which heretofore upon ſeveral Occaſions uſed to be kindled in you. By this Method you will ſtrengthen your Faculties, and enlarge your Powers; and by degrees bring your ſelves to that happy Temper of Soul, that there will be no great *War* between the *Law* of your *Members*, and the *Law* of your *Minds*: But the *World* and the *Fleſh* will be *Crucified* to you, as you are to them; that I may uſe St. *Paul*'s Expreſſions.

But then *Fourthly*, That you may be able not only to keep *bad* Thoughts out of your Minds; but

but alſo to have a conſtant Spring of *good* ones; there are ſome particular Exerciſes very proper for this purpoſe to be recommended. Such I mean as theſe, *Converſe with diſcreet and pious Perſons*; *Reading good Books*, eſpecially the *Holy Scriptures*; Taking times of *Meditation* and *Recollection*; And above all, *Fervent* and *Conſtant Prayer to God.*

It is not to be told how every one of theſe things doth help to inſpire us with good Thoughts and Purpoſes.

A little paſſage now and then, though but occaſionally *dropt* in a Converſation, that is to the buſineſs of Vertue and Goodneſs, will ſupply us ſome times with matter for good Thoughts for a conſiderable while after. What laſting Impreſſions then, do you think, would be left upon our Minds, if we made it our conſtant Exerciſe every day, to read or hear ſome thing out of the Bible, or ſome other good Book, with a deſign to grow Better thereby?

But above all things we muſt take care to be diligent and ſerious in our Applications to the Throne of Grace: It is Hearty Prayer and Devotion, that when all is done, will prove the moſt Effectual Means, for the keeping our Hearts ſteady to that which is Good, and ſecuring them from the

the Pollutions of the ſenſible Earthly Objects that do ſurround us.

O therefore let us be conſtant in our Religious Offices. Nay, let us take every opportunity that our Affairs will allow us of raiſing our Minds to God, and thanking him for his infinite Love and Goodneſs to us, and imploring the Continual Influences of his Grace and Holy Spirit, and re-inforcing our Vows and Purpoſes of perſevering in his Service.

By this means we ſhall come to lead Spiritual Lives indeed. Our Souls will be a perpetual Fountain of Good Thoughts. And while we live here, our Converſation will be in Heaven. For God and Chriſt, and the things above will have our *Hearts*, though the World hath our *Bodies*.

But then, in the *Fifth* and laſt place, Notwithſtanding what I have hitherto ſaid, concerning the *Diligence* with which we are to *keep* our *Hearts*; Yet this is always to be remembered, That with our *Diligence* we muſt be careful to join *Diſcretion*.

My Meaning is this, We muſt have a care not to *intend* our Thoughts immoderately, and more than our Tempers will bear, even to the beſt things:

things: But we muſt ſo *keep* our *Hearts*, as at the ſame time, to preſerve our *Healths*, and keep up the Vigour of our Minds.

And the way to do that, is, Not to put them too much, or too long, upon the ſtretch at any one time: But to relax them when there is occaſion, and to let them run out, and entertain themſelves upon any thing that comes next to hand, ſo long as it is Innocent.

It is a vain thing to imagine, that we can always be thinking of our great Buſineſs; or that we can be always a Praying, or Reading, or Meditating; or, that, as our Condition is in this World, even the greater part of our Thoughts, ſhould be ſuch as we call *Devout* and *Religious* Thoughts.

God hath provided a great deal of other Buſineſs for us to apply our Minds to, ſo long as we live in this World. And by minding that diligently, and conſcientiouſly, we do ſerve God as acceptably, as if we were Reading or Praying.

Nay even then, when we have no urgent Buſineſs upon our hands to take up our Minds, it is not neceſſary that we ſhould be always thinking of Religion. Nor would I call every Thought,

a *vain*, or an *idle*, or a *ſinful* Thought, that hath not God, or our Spiritual Concernments for its Object. Even the moſt Spiritually-minded among us, muſt oftentimes be content to be entertained with ſuch Thoughts as our Company, or our Temper, or the preſent Circumſtances we are in, do ſuggeſt to us. And provided thoſe Thoughts be innocent, and do not intrench upon the Laws of *Piety*, and *Purity*, and *Charity*; be they otherwiſe very trifling and impertinent: I ſay, I would not look upon them as *ill Thoughts*, nor have any one angry at himſelf upon account of them.

The truth of it is, So long as we conſiſt of Bodies and Souls, we cannot always be thinking of Serious things. They indeed are the Wiſeſt that think of them moſt, but it is even dangerous to attempt to think of them always. For as moſt Mens Conſtitutions are, that is the ready way to ſpoil the Habit of our Bodies, and by that means to render our Minds perfectly unfit for *Thinking* at all, to any good Purpoſes.

Thus have I laid before you the Main Things wherein, as I do believe, the right *Governing our Thoughts* doth conſiſt. And I doubt not, they are ſo ſafe, and ſo effectual, that whoſoever will ſincerely

cerely practiſe them, as far as he can, will ſo *keep* his *Heart*, that the *Iſſues* from thence in his *Life* and Converſation will be Happy and Proſperous. I conclude all with the *Collect* of this Day.

Almighty God, who ſeeſt that we have no power of our ſelves to help our ſelves; Keep us both outwardly in our Bodies, and inwardly in our Souls; that we may be defended from all Adverſities which may happen to the Body, and from all EVIL THOUGHTS *which may aſſault and hurt the Soul, through Jeſus Chriſt our Lord.*

FINIS.